

## ABILENE REFLECTOR

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### Adventures of Tad;

OR THE—  
HAPS AND MISHAPS OF A LOST SACHEL.

A Story for Young and Old.

BY FRANK H. CONVERSE,  
AUTHOR OF "PEPPER ADAMS," "BLOWS OUT  
TO SEA," "PAUL GRAPTON," ETC.

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#### CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

Tad knew nothing about playing a trout, and if he had it would have made no difference, owing to his primitive fishing tackle. He pulled vigorously; so did the trout, and "snap!" went the end of the alder pole, leaving Tad in a mad frenzy of excitement, with three-fourths of the rod in his hands, dancing madly on the rocks.

Joe was equal to the situation. Dropping his own pole, he made a dive for the broken fragment, which was floating in sight. Gathering the slack line carefully in his hands, a vigorous tug landed high and dry the largest trout ever caught in Mill brook.

"There!" Joe exclaimed, as Tad regarded his prize in an amazement too deep for words, "you've caught the one real trout you've wanted to—now, I guess we'd better be getting home, without doing any more fishing."

"All right," returned Tad, mournfully, "but you caught him, after all, Joe." But Joe stoutly asserted that Tad hooked him first, while he—Joe—only helped to bring the big fish safe to land. And, in the discussion of the exciting episode, the walk home was accomplished in a surprisingly short time.

Tad's big trout was baked for supper, and it was generally agreed by the four who partook thereof that the flavor was particularly fine. Tad himself secretly thought he had never eaten any thing so delicious in his whole life. But it is not unlikely that the knowledge that he himself had furnished this important adjunct to the evening meal gave him an additional relish for Tad.

By this time Tad had begun to feel very much at ease with these quiet, home-like people. As they gathered about the open fire-place, with its smoldering back-log, after the teachings were cleared away, and the big kerosene-lamp was lighted, he opened his heart to their kindly questioning and spoke freely of his past life. There was really little or nothing to keep back, for, as I have said, thanks to the memory of his mother's teachings and a natural uprightness of character, Tad had escaped the evil ways which a homeless, friendless boy is so apt to fall into, and, though he had faults in abundance, he was, on the whole, a more upright young fellow than many whose surroundings and advantages had been far more favorable than Tad's.

"So you're to begin ship's duties to Miss Smith on Monday—eh, Tad?" remarked the Captain, thoughtfully, to break a little silence which had fallen upon the group.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "and I do hope she'll like me."

"She'll be hard to suit if she don't," returned Mrs. Flagg, clicking her needles emphatically together as they flashed in and out of the meshes of a blue yarn sock that she was knitting for the Captain. For the good lady, whose heart was large enough to take in at least half a dozen motherless boys and girls, had begun to regard Tad with considerable favor.

"I know she'll like you," said Polly, confidently, as she looked up from the fascinating pages of "Little Women," which she was reading for the first time, while Bounce slumbered peacefully in her lap.

"You just go on and do your duty unto Miss Smith accordin' as you'd have it done to you, Tad," remarked the Captain, circularly, "and you needn't have no fears. Miss Smith," continued Captain Flagg, with upraised finger to command attention, "is a female that's had a tempestuous y'ye in life, as it were, a-losing of every relation she had, which has gone to make her a bit cranky; but she's good-hearted and God-fearin', and once you get into her good books, you're always there."

"They say she's got a han'sum property that her folks left her—some-where nigh ten thousand dollars," Mrs. Flagg observed, in a voice indicative of considerable respect for the possessor of such wealth. For in Bixport the person with an unnumbered estate and a thousand dollars was "well-to-do"; he who had five thousand was well off; while the owner of ten thousand dollars was regarded in the light of a millionaire.

#### CHAPTER X.

On the following morning, when Tad, having opened his eyes to the glad sunlight which streamed in at the east window of his little room, began to pull his drowsy ideas together, he remembered that it was Sunday.

"They'll want me to go to church, and I don't look decent," thought Tad, disconsolately, with a glance in the direction of the chair where he had placed his threadbare clothing the night before.

But what was this? A partly worn suit of serviceable tweed cloth—the very counterpart of that in which Joe Whitney was arrayed when he sprang aboard the "Mary J.," hung over the chair-back. And that was not all. In the chair itself lay all the other essentials of a boy's toilet, neatly folded, even to a coarse white linen collar, a whisp of black neck-ribbon, a pair of but little used lace-up boots, and a "second-best" straw hat.

Scarcely able to believe the evidence of his astonished eyes, Tad slipped out of bed and proceeded to investigate. On the top of the pile was a bit of paper, wherein, in an irregular, boyish scrawl, were written the words: "To Pay for makin' Miss Smith think you was dead and playin' it was a bare—J. Whitney."

After Tad had gone to bed on the

previous evening, Mrs. Flagg slipped over to Deacon Whitney's, and ably seconded by the special pleadings of Joe, succeeded in enlisting the full sympathies of the family in behalf of shabbily-dressed Tad. Joe's wardrobe was overhauled, and a selection made, resulting in the surprise to Tad which I have mentioned.

"Well, he's what I call a nice-looking boy," said Mrs. Flagg's inward comment, as Tad, with hair neatly combed and face and hands scrubbed till they fairly shone, came shyly downstairs dressed in his new suit.

Polly smiled upon him approvingly; the Captain remarked that he didn't know about taking such a dandified-looking chap to church along of such plain-dressed folks as the Flagg family; and Mrs. Flagg gave him a motherly kiss.

"That's so much like Joe," laughed Polly, as the display of the paper which Tad had found with his little gift necessitated an explanation of Joe's previous performances.

"Always remember, Tad," counseled the Captain, with a grave shake of the head, as they sat down to the table together, "what Solomon says about a wise son makin' a glad father—and he that is not warned thereby is not wise," concluded Captain Flagg, who was sometimes a little hazy in the correctness of his quotations.

After breakfast, the Captain read a chapter from the New Testament aloud, making comments upon the text, for the edification of Tad and Polly, who listened with respectful attention. And then, after awhile, at the summons of the rather unmusical church-bell, the whole family decorously made their way to the meeting-house, close by.

The Bixporters were, generally speaking, a church-going people; and, on the pleasant April morning of which I speak, the church was well filled.

To Tad's secret joy, Deacon Whitney's pew was next Captain Flagg's, and soon he had the extreme satisfaction of seeing Joe filing in ahead of his sister, followed by Mrs. Whitney and the deacon. Joe sat at the extreme end, and thus the two boys were divided only by the slight partition between the pews.

Joe greeted Tad with a wink, and clasping his hands together, rolled his eyes upward, as though in rapturous astonishment at Tad's festive appearance.

"I think you're just as good as you can be, and I wish I had something to give you!" whispered Tad, warmly.

"Poh, that's all right," returned Joe, shrugging his shoulders carelessly; and a whispered conversation ensued, which was only checked by the entrance of the minister; whereat Joe, duly admonished by a poke of his sister's fan, and



"WELL, HE IS WHAT I CALL A NICE-LOOKING BOY."

a glance of mild rebuke from the deacon, subsided into a temporary attention, with his hands being plunged deeply into his pockets and his eyes fixed steadfastly upon good Mr. Allen. But I am sorry to say, Joe's thoughts were by no means in keeping with the place. He was cherishing, and even planning, a dire revenge on unconscious Samantha Nason—who sat directly in front of him, in Miss Smith's pew—for what he called her "tattling" of the previous day.

The service proceeded in the good old-fashioned way peculiar to country churches. All denominations worshipped under the same roof, and Mr. Allen's words were but a plain and simple talk about the lessons taught by One who once walked upon earth, and spoke as never man spoke. There was very much in it that Tad perfectly understood, and, as he listened, a dim desire to fashion his young life after the teachings of the great Master began to take form in his mind. True, it was only embodied in the simple thought, "I'll try to be a better boy," yet from such beginnings oftentimes comes the real success of a true Christian life. And when the sermon closed Tad felt that he should never be tired of listening to a minister who made things as plain as did Mr. Allen.

Now, it was Samantha Nason's invariable habit to sit through the singing, while the others rose. "I work hard all the week, and I'm going to make Sunday my day of rest," said Samantha once, a little defiantly, "an' I guess I can worship the Lord as well settin' down as standin' up."

As the closing hymn was being sung, Tad noticed that Joe, who all through the service had kept his right hand persistently in his pocket, slowly withdrew it, though without removing his eyes from the pages of the hymn-book, and, seemingly holding something in his grasp, slipped his closed hand gently along on the ledge of the pew before him, till it was in close proximity to the back of Miss Nason's neck. Then he stole a sly glance in the direction of his father and mother, who were too intent upon following the words of the hymn (in which their daughter Nellie's voice uprose as clear and sweet as the notes of a woodland bird) to notice the movements of their son. Slowly Joe's fingers unclenched, and after a moment his hand stole back to a place beside its fellow.

"Now what is he up to?" thought Tad, warned by the shadowy grin on Joe's features. And, following the direction of his friend's eyes, Tad's unspoken question was answered. Clumsily clambering over the back of the prim ruffe about Miss Nason's neck was a brown wood-beetle, as big as the end of Tad's little finger. But before he could decide what to do Miss

Nason bounced to her feet with a stifled exclamation, and clutched frantically at her back hair. Unfortunately she caught hold of the innocent beetle itself, and, giving vent to a shrill scream that made the rafters of the house ring, she threw it violently from her, to the great consternation of every one in the house, many of whom imagined Miss Nason had discovered a mouse in the pew.

Mr. Allen pronounced the benediction and dismissed his congregation. And naughty Joe Whitney, holding his cap before his face, choked and gasped, in the agonies of suppressed laughter, all the way to the door.

#### CHAPTER XI.

The promise of April had given place to the fulfillments of June, filling the air with summer sunshine and beauty. Tad, under the supervision of Miss Smith, whose angular features were shaded by an immense garden-hat, was weeding the pansy-bed in the front yard. Miss Smith, who was a great flower-lover, made somewhat of a specialty of cultivating sweet-peas and pansies, which she gave away in their season with a liberal hand.

You would hardly have recognized Tad in the brown-faced boy, in blue overalls, bending lovingly over the quaint, upturned flower-faces that peered into his own. He had taken to his new vocation with surprising readiness, and Miss Smith secretly congratulated herself on having at last found a boy after her own heart, though she seldom allowed her satisfaction to show itself in the form of words.

"Here comes that Forrest chap again," muttered Miss Smith, discontentedly, as she glanced toward an elaborately-dressed young man who was sauntering along the elm-shaded street; "I wish he'd kept away about his own business, and not come idling round, taking your attention off'n your work."

For Mr. Paul Forrest was one of John Doty's city boarders, who had scraped an acquaintance with Tad very soon after coming to Bixport. He seemed to take a singular interest in Tad, which, as he explained to Miss Smith, arose from the boy's strong resemblance to his youngest and only brother, who had died a year previous—"the last one, excepting myself, of a family of seven," he said, with a sad smile. For Mr. Forrest did a great deal of smiling, first and last, and, curious enough, Tad, in some vague way, was reminded by it of the genial Mr. Jones, whom he had met in Boston, before coming to Bixport. Of course, this was simply an absurd fancy on his part. The fraudulent Jones was a smooth-faced young man, with gold-tipped teeth—while Mr. Paul Forrest sported a very glossy black mustache, that had a purplish tinge in certain lights, and the whitest and most even teeth that were ever seen outside a dentist's establishment; neither was the little blueish scar visible upon Mr. Forrest's white forehead, that Tad had noticed upon the intellectual brow of Jones. Yet, all the same, he often unconsciously connected the two in his mind, even while he laughed at his own folly in so doing.

"Miss Smith, good-morning—Tad, my boy, how are you?" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, with his effusive smile, as he lounged idly up the garden-path, and, with a coolness peculiar to himself, sat down on the edge of the garden piazza.

Miss Smith stiffly acknowledged the greeting, and Tad, glancing up shyly, said he was pretty well. He was a little flattered by Mr. Forrest's evident interest in himself—though he was not quite sure that he liked it, after all. He had nothing in common with the city-bred gentleman, and was rather puzzled to know what Mr. Forrest could have in common with himself.

"Come into the house after you get through weeding, Tad; I want you," said Miss Smith, stalking past the unabashed Mr. Forrest, who sat quite at his ease, with the ivory head of his cane between his lips.

"Yes'm," was the meek reply, and Tad silently continued his work, wishing that Mr. Forrest would go, for he was very well aware that Miss Smith did not at all approve of the gentleman's frequent visitations.

In a small village like Bixport, where every body's business is public property, the story of Tad and his traveling sachel was generally known, as was also the fact that no attention had ever been paid to Captain Flagg's advertisement. So it was not strange that Mr. Forrest should be in possession of the same knowledge. He had referred to the matter casually in conversation with Tad, declaring that it was a mighty interesting incident in real life—come, now!

"So you never opened the little alligator-skin sachel, to see what was in it—eh, Tad?" suddenly asked Mr. Forrest, after a short pause.

"Why, no, sir! I haven't a key—and, if I had, I don't think it would be just the thing, either," replied Tad, a little surprised at the unexpected question.

"Oh, I don't know," remarked Mr. Forrest, coolly; "there might be something in it that would give you a clew to the real owner."

"That's true," murmured Tad, who had never thought of this before.

"I think it's your duty to try and open it," continued Mr. Forrest, seeing the impression he had made.

"But I couldn't without breaking the lock, and I should not like to do that," Tad answered, with a perplexed look.

"I suppose you keep it in your possession?" inquired Mr. Forrest, carelessly; and Tad nodded. "Then, why not bring the bag over to my room this evening?—I dare say some of my keys will unlock it," suggested the gentleman, blandly.

"I'll think about it, sir," replied Tad, cautiously, for he was not quite sure that it would be just the right thing to do; and, moreover, he wanted to ask the advice of Miss Smith, in whose good judgment Tad had the firmest confidence, before taking any such decisive step.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

"I will not write any more," said a friend in closing her letter, "for there is a putting in the kitchen patiently waiting to be made."—Chicago Advocate.

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